

Guidance on using this document:

This document may be used as a guidance for individuals or organizations (e.g. public health officials, NGO field staff) who interact with the public (e.g. community members) so that they are prepared to clarify any misinformation they hear. In using this document, take care not to reinforce misinformation and rumours by repeating them.

Note that the following message is repeated as a response under many of the rumours about treatments and cures below.

***Key Prevention Message:** It is critical that the following message about prevention be shared in its entirety as follows: To protect yourself, make sure you clean your hands frequently and thoroughly and avoid touching your eyes, mouth, and nose. Hand-washing with soap and keeping a physical distance of 1m are the number one steps recommended by health professionals to protect individuals and help prevent spreading the virus to others. People with severe symptoms may be treated in hospital with equipment that helps them breath, however most people are able to recover from the symptoms without this level of treatment. If you feel sick with mild symptoms, stay at home in isolation and strictly avoid sharing space with other members of the family for at least 15 days. The same is true if one of your family members are affected because you may also have the virus. Call the national MoPH hotline on 166 or your provincial MoPH hotline if you need more information.*

The rumour response plan and strategy, and dissemination of the information in this document is to be comprehensive and determined by the RCCE Working Group.

RUMOURS RELATED TO TREATMENTS/CURES/PREVENTION**1. There are many rumours about cures and treatments for COVID-19. Including these:**

- **Drinking black tea will cure COVID-19.**
- **Gargling with salt water can cause the coronavirus to disappear in the throat.**
- **Drinking and washing your face and hands with coca-cola**
- **Drinking ethanol and other 'miracle cures'**
- **Drinking water washes coronavirus down into your stomach and stomach's acid can kill it.**
- **Slice a lemon and add it to hot water and drink it. It creates like a kind of alkali that makes your body immune to coronavirus.**
- **Eating dried fruits (with "heaty" attributes) such as almonds, pistachios, etc., will make you resistant to coronavirus.**
- **Violet oil can be used for COVID-19 treatment.**

Answer: According to the World Health Organisation, to date, there is no vaccine and no specific medicine to prevent or treat the new coronavirus (2019-nCoV). Those infected with the virus should receive appropriate care to relieve and treat symptoms, and those with severe symptoms should receive optimized medical care. People with severe symptoms may be treated in hospital with equipment that helps them breath, however most people are able to recover from the symptoms without this level of treatment. Some specific treatments are under investigation and are being actively tested through clinical trials which have now advanced to animal and human trials. WHO and governments around the world are undertaking research to understand the virus and try to develop treatments and vaccines. Many pharmaceutical and natural medicines have been used throughout history to treat and cure colds and flus and infections. Drinking water, lemon and other forms of natural/fresh juice (no additives), tea, honey and

other healthy substances can generally help and sometimes improve our immunity. There is currently no specific cure or guaranteed prevention for the new coronavirus known as COVID-19. Some social media messages have indicated that drinking warm liquids or water with herbs helps dislodge or kill the virus in the throat, however health experts warn that no evidence has been found to support this claim.

Keeping a healthy diet and lifestyle, drinking water, tea with lemon and eating fruits and vegetables may help improve your general health, immunity and your ability to fight all kind of illnesses. But there is no guarantee that these things will protect you from COVID-19. The most important way is through social distancing and hygiene. Making sure that you clean your hands frequently and thoroughly and avoid touching your eyes, mouth, and nose. Hand-washing with soap and keeping a physical distance of 1m are the number one steps recommended by health professionals to protect individuals and help prevent spreading the virus to others.

2. Burning wild rue (esfand) will kill the virus. People believe this plant is a holy plant; as such, it has the power to kill the microbes and the virus.

Answer: There is no evidence to confirm that burning plants, including burning wild rue (esfand), could eliminate the virus. To protect yourself, make sure you clean your hands frequently and thoroughly and avoid touching your eyes, mouth, and nose. Hand-washing with soap and keeping a physical distance of 1m (or one person's length) are the number one steps recommended by health professionals to protect individuals and help prevent spreading the virus to others. People with severe symptoms may be treated in hospital with equipment that helps them breath, however most people are able to recover from the symptoms without this level of treatment.

3. Malaria drugs can treat COVID-19.

Answer: There is no clear evidence that Malaria drugs, specifically chloroquine, can prevent or treat the COVID-19 virus. However, there are currently tests being conducted around the world to search for a treatment and a vaccine for the virus. Malaria medication can have negative side effects on health and are not a recommended treatment measure at this time. We are aware that Resochin, a commercial drug containing chloroquine is currently being prescribed by some doctors in Afghanistan. Side effects can include nausea, sun sensitivity, night terrors and other impacts which are individual specific. Malaria and HIV drugs are being tested to see if they are effective against this virus. To protect yourself, make sure you clean your hands frequently and thoroughly and avoid touching your eyes, mouth, and nose. Hand-washing with soap and keeping a physical distance of 1m are the number one steps recommended by health professionals to protect individuals and help prevent spreading the virus to others. People with severe symptoms may be treated in hospital with equipment that helps them breath, however most people are able to recover from the symptoms without this level of treatment.

4. Warm weather kills coronavirus.

Answer: You can contract COVID-19, no matter how warm or sunny the weather is. Many countries with warm weather have reported cases of COVID-19. The coronavirus known as COVID-19 is part of a family of viruses that can affect people more during the cold weather and winter season. Therefore, it was originally thought that the warm weather may limit the spread of the virus. There is currently no evidence to prove this claim. At this stage, it is important to take precautions and actions to prevent the spread of the virus. To protect yourself, make sure you clean your hands frequently and thoroughly and avoid touching your eyes, mouth, and nose. Hand-washing with soap and keeping a physical distance of 1m are the number one steps recommended by health professionals to protect individuals and help prevent spreading the virus to others.

5. Drinking alcohol can kill coronavirus in the body.

Answer: Drinking alcohol cannot kill the coronavirus in the body. Pure alcohol (ethanol) and other products like bleach and disinfectant are used to clean and disinfect surfaces and should not be ingested. They can cause illness or even death as a result of poisoning if you drink them. To protect yourself, make sure you clean your hands frequently and thoroughly and avoid touching your eyes, mouth, and nose. Hand-washing with soap and keeping a physical distance of 1m are the number one steps recommended by health professionals to protect individuals and help prevent spreading the virus to others.

6. Some people believe that hashish (chars) can treat people for COVID-19.

Answer: Hashish is not used for the treatment of COVID-19. There is currently no cure or reliable treatment for people with symptoms of COVID-19. To protect yourself, make sure you clean your hands frequently and thoroughly and avoid touching your eyes, mouth, and nose. Hand-washing with soap and keeping a physical distance of 1m are the number one steps recommended by health professionals to protect individuals and help prevent spreading the virus to others.

7. Afghan people are more resistant to diseases because our immune systems adapted themselves with environmental pollution.

Answer: Cases of COVID-19 have been confirmed in many countries where there is a lot of environmental pollution and research demonstrates that COVID has a greater impact on those persons who live in countries with elevated levels of air and water pollution. No one of any nationality, race, culture or religion has immunity to this virus. In Afghanistan, by April 2020, MoPH data shows that more than 500 people across 25 provinces are now confirmed to have the virus. As COVID-19 is spread from person-to-person, it is possible to contract COVID-19 within Afghanistan from individuals who have been infected.

8. According to the message being passed on by some mullahs, the only thing people need to do to stay safe is pray five times a day. After all, "Muslims will not be infected or are immune to the virus." Some have also said that the virus cannot be transmitted from person-to-person or that it will impact some ethnic groups or nationalities more than others.

Answer: COVID-19 is transmitted person to person and is indiscriminate. No one of any race, culture or religion has immunity to this virus. When large groups have gathered for religious worship, weddings or funerals together, the virus has travelled between people and spread into communities. The community-level transmission is one reason why it has spread so fast and so easily around the world. COVID-19 has now spread to over 184 countries and territories around the world, including Afghanistan and all of its neighboring countries. To protect yourself, make sure you clean your hands frequently and thoroughly and avoid touching your eyes, mouth, and nose. Hand-washing with soap and keeping a physical distance of 1m are the number one steps recommended by health professionals to protect individuals and help prevent spreading the virus to others.

9. People went to the Mullah and were given Tawiz, some written papers for COVID-19 treatment.

Answer: During times of crisis, faith remains a fundamental part of life and community practice. In addition to observing religious practices during health crises, it is important to follow health professionals' advice and infection prevention precautions to avoid further spreading the virus within our communities. Hand-washing with soap and keeping a physical distance of 1m are the number one steps recommended by health professionals to protect individuals and help prevent spreading the virus to others. Hand-washing with soap during the five prayers will reduce the chances of further transmission. Additional steps are also recommended such as; avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth if your hands are not clean; practice physical distancing and stay at home if you feel unwell.

10. The countries strongly affected by the coronavirus have limited religious beliefs.

Answer: Cases of COVID-19 have been confirmed all over the world in Muslim and non-Muslim countries. No one of any nationality, race, culture or religion has immunity to this virus. In Afghanistan, by April 2020, MoPH data shows that more than 500 people across 25 provinces are now confirmed to have the virus.

Islamic law is based on five major objectives, the first and most emphasized of which is the preservation of life and prevention of harm. Government has prohibited large gatherings, also Muslims must comply with the mandate as Islam teaches us to adhere to those who direct the public in avoiding harm. Any congregation that takes place needs to follow these guidelines, whether at the mosque, workplace or classroom. We cannot ignore that people in closer proximity are at a higher risk of contracting COVID-19. Congregational prayers should resume when Health officials and doctors say it is safe to do so. For those who are unwell, and during this time of prohibited gathering, it is requested that you maintain spiritual practices through prayer at home. We pray that Allah protects the health of our families and our communities and restores the health of all those who are sick here in Afghanistan, and around the world.

11. If a COVID-19 affected person dies, there will not be the same prayers as for a normal person who dies. For example, a COVID-19 effected death will not be eligible for performing the Jenaza prayers and he/she will be thrown into the grave by an ambulance. Some photos are circulating in social media as a proof.

Another rumour is that those who die from COVID-19, the government is wrapping them up in nylon, covering them in lime and using an excavator to bury them in a central location. People are concerned as this kind of practice is against their religious beliefs.

Answer: Special precautions should be taken when handling the body of an individual who dies after suffering from COVID-19 to avoid further transmission of the virus to other. However, they will be treated in the same way as other people who die of other causes, in accordance with Islamic traditions.

People may die of COVID-19 in health care facilities, home or in other locations and the safety and well-being of everyone who tends to bodies should be the first priority. The dignity of the dead, their cultural and religious traditions, and their families should be respected and protected throughout. But large numbers of people gathering for funeral prayers should be avoided to prevent transmission between people who may have the virus without knowing. The hasty disposal of the body of a person who died from COVID-19, should be avoided.

12. There is a rumor that this disease will continue for 1-2 years. All borders will be closed. Eventually, there will be famine years and people will die due to starvation.

Answer: The COVID-19 pandemic is a challenge for Afghanistan. With a fragile health system and underlying vulnerabilities, the people of Afghanistan are likely to face negative consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Cases are expected to increase rapidly over the weeks ahead as community transmission escalates. Strong management of the country's border-crossings is critical to ensuring proper screening of people who are returning to Afghanistan. Ensuring commercial and humanitarian supplies can cross borders is critical to minimising price rises and ensuring life-saving assistance can be distributed. The Afghan government and international actors are working closely with governments in the region to ensure that borders stay open or temporary exemptions are granted to allow stranded persons to return home or commercial traffic can continue.

13. It is believed that the type of virus seen in each country will vary depending on what was planned for that specific location.

Answer: Coronavirus does not respect borders, nationalities, race, religion or ethnicity. The spread of the virus in each country depends largely on what control measures the respective governments have taken and will take to prevent and manage the spread of the virus. WHO and governments around the world are undertaking research to understand the virus and try to develop treatments and vaccines.